

Fightback

Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism

Issue #2

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An end to Zero hour Contracts?

\$2

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Fightback magazine is now in its 20th year as we continue the long-term fight for socialism. Readers and supporters may consider remembering us in their will with assets or money that will help the struggle in the long-term. If this is you please put in your will 'Fightback, PO Box 10-282, Dominion Road, Auckland' as well as what you would like to leave to us.

For Fightback's second issue in 2015, we focus on the fight for secure hours and living wages. While this fight is long-term, it's particularly timely as glimmers of hope emerge from a youthful workers' movement in casual service sector jobs.

At the time of writing, the first international fast food workers' day of action, April 15th, is drawing to a close (covered p23). In the US, the Fight For 15 movement, in which fast food workers have played a leading role, is rejuvenating the working-class movement.

In Aotearoa/NZ, the major fast food chains - KFC, Burger King and McDonalds - have backed down on Zero Hour contracts after a struggle led by Unite Union (see P23). Even infamous right-wing commentators Mike Hosking and Paul Henry, sided with Unite Union over Zero Hours Contracts. The government has indicated that it may back down on legislation enabling the contracts. Lest we get complacent, Unite's Auckland office was raided and robbed on April 16 (see p23 or unite.org.nz/donate for details on how to donate).

This is a war, and for about 30 years the capitalist class has been winning, in an assault known as neoliberalism (p18).

Successful battles for job security and other improvements may not be enough, but they inspire the confidence necessary to fight for greater control. We'll leave the last word to Trish Kahle, a US socialist and union member, in a status updated posted on Facebook:

"When we walked off the job for the first time in 2013, \$15/hour seemed to most like a radical demand, and I was pretty frightened that I would lose my job. But I had my co-workers, my fellow union members, and my comrades beside me. Their courage was contagious, and so we walked out and joined a movement that was only just beginning. Today, \$15/hour is common sense and 63% of the population supports it. Struggle changes the course of history. And we can win so much more than \$15 an hour. We run this world, and it should be ours: 'not to slave in, but to master and to own.'

#FightFor15

#AnotherWorldIsPossible"

About Fightback

Under our current system, democracy consists of a vote every 3 years. Most of our lives are lived under dictatorship, the dictatorship of bosses and WINZ case managers. *Fightback* stands for a system in which our workplaces, our schools, our universities are run democratically, for social need rather than private profit.

Fightback participates in the MANA Movement, whose stated mission is to bring "rangatiratanga to the poor, the powerless and the dispossessed." Capitalism was imposed in Aotearoa through colonisation, and the fight for indigenous self-determination is intimately connected with the fight for an egalitarian society. We also maintain an independent Marxist organisation outside of parliament, to offer a vision of a world beyond the parliamentary capitalist system.

Fightback stands against all forms of oppression. We believe working-class power, the struggle of the majority for self-determination, is the basis for ending all forms of oppression. However, we also recognise that daily inequities such as sexism must be addressed here and now, not just after the revolution.

Fightback is embedded in a range of struggles on the ground; including building a fighting trade union movement, movements for gender and sexual liberation, and anti-racism.

Fightback also publishes a monthly magazine, and a website, to offer a socialist perspective on ongoing struggles.

Fightback stands for struggle, solidarity and socialism.

Fightback
Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism

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Socialist Perspectives for Aotearoa/New Zealand



Excerpt from a document by the Committee for a Workers International (Aotearoa/NZ).

Bosses seeking to undermine traditional sectors

During the last upturn, the employers sought to increase profitability by placing emphasis on increasing absolute

surplus value. For example, in 2004 workers in New Zealand were working longer hours than in any OECD country except Japan. In more recent times, however, employers are now seeking to increase surplus value by further rationalising and flexibilising the labour process.

In particular, the employers in the traditionally unionised sectors want access to the flexibility and casualisation that exists in other sectors. This is what was behind the 2012 attacks on the condi-

tions of meat workers throughout the country. It is also what is behind the attacks on port workers in Auckland – an ongoing situation where there is currently something of a stalemate.

The link between profitability and the recent attacks on meat workers shows the way in which the employers want to offload their profit woes on to workers. Beef and sheep still account for over 15% of New Zealand exports. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has stated that there have been profitability

difficulties in the industry since at least 2009. In fact profitability issues for the meat sector go back decades, hence the decline in beef and sheep farming and exports.

The locking out of over 100 CMP company meat workers in the MANAwtu area from late October 2011 to late December 2012 was followed by the locking out of over 800 AFFCO workers in several meat processing plants for more than three months in 2012. The lockouts represented a new level of employer hostility in that the lockouts weren't started as retaliation to union-led industrial activity, but were started to attempt to force union workers to accept deep cutbacks.

Talleys purchased the AFFCO plants in 2011 and were demanding more flexibility in the workplace. The company's demand for greater flexibility was connected to its requirement for more control over the workplace. Greater flexibility is then imposed and used to increase exploitation and therefore squeeze more profits out of the workforce.

Many AFFCO plants are now antiquated. Instead of resolving efficiency problems through investing in plant and machinery to create state of the art workplaces, New Zealand capitalists have focussed on making the workforce leaner, making it work harder and faster.

At the Ports of Auckland Limited the employer attacks against the wharves (stevedores), including lockouts, have been fundamentally about trying to reduce the conditions and power of workers in traditional union jobs and force them down to the flexibilised conditions of the broader workforce in New Zealand.

A TV report about the dispute, in January 2012, said that "Businesses say it's a battle between old and new work practices" and Kim Campbell of the Employers and Manufacturers Association said, "I think it's do or die personally, and that really is a serious matter..."

The Auckland ports director told TV3 News that "Our singular focus is on addressing old-fashioned workplace practices that are a handbrake on flexibility and productivity."

Essentially, employers are now going after core industrial workers in an attempt to make those workers subject to the neo-liberal workplace conditions of job insecurity, work insecurity (less guaranteed hours of work), income insecurity, individualisation of bonuses and benefits, and other elements of the neo-liberal work environment. When other parts of the workforce are unorganised and working in these conditions, then the core workforce is more vulnerable to the types of attacks that are happening now.

In the stalemate at the Ports of Auckland, the Maritime Union employment agreement has expired and the employer has attempted to gain traction for a scab union. This dispute needs to be seen as a wake-up call to the union movement. A setback for one of the most well paid and highly organised sections of the working class is a setback for all workers.

Service sector workers struggle for income security and job security

Care-workers have also been struggling over the last two to three years with strike action taking place at the workplaces of the country's largest rest home companies. Additionally, in this period the Service and Food Workers union has won an important legal decision which held that overnight stays must be compensated at the minimum wage. Unite Union has continued to progress and build amongst fast-food and cinema workers, and this included a long round of strikes and other actions at McDonald's outlets throughout the country. As always the key demands of Unite members have been around secure work and guaranteed hours.

Key slogans for the workers movement

Service sector struggles are connected with the struggles of workers in traditional union jobs. The service sector campaigns are generally offensive campaigns against already existing casualisation and flexibilisation. The struggles at the ports and in the meat works were defensive struggles against casualisation and flexibilisation which the bosses have sought to impose.

In order to unify the struggles of the working class over the next period, unions should adopt a general slogan along the lines of "Secure Work, Secure Hours, Living Wage". Joint industrial action, across sectors, should be organised. This type of campaign would be the best way to win improvements to the minimum wage and give workers the confidence to challenge the existing anti-worker laws.

Industrial tactics

A feature of some industrial disputes of late has been the unwillingness of union leaders to blockade or put 'hard' pickets on workplace entrances to defend against scabs and to stop the supply chain. This is a concerning trend apparent during a number of recent disputes. There have been some situations where there has been a systematic allowing of scabs through the gates and the normal operations and supply have continued.

This is dramatically different to only seven and a half years ago when, in the National Distribution Union versus Progressive Enterprises dispute, key warehouses were systematically blockaded and flying pickets were established to stop the operation of makeshift dispatch centres with force. Similar tactics were used by other unions at the time. Socialists must fight for the restoration of militant tactics in the trade union movement. This is not a mere ideological point. With employers becoming more aggressive militant industrial tactics are necessary.

Self-employment: A two-edged sword for workers

By Daphne Lawless (*Fightback Tamaki Makaurau/Auckland*).

According to the 2013 census, just over 15% of residents in Aotearoa/New Zealand report earning income from self-employment. This is about the same percentage reported for Britain, according to Richard Seymour in *The Guardian*, which is apparently “the highest level since records began”. Another British socialist, Chris Bambery, points out that over the last five years, the income of British self-employed workers have dropped by something like 25%.

What does this mean for those interested in socialist politics, workers’ power, and liberation today? Marxist theory has traditionally described the self-employed as “petit bourgeoisie” – in other words, as small capitalists, squeezed between big business and the working class. Such people are commonly stereotyped as conservative politically, obsessed with profit-making, somewhat anti-social and with a “not-in-my-backyard” suspicion of social programmes. Perhaps the dominant image in our culture would be the classic TV comedy character Basil Fawlty.

This is an image which leads many socialists to think that self-employment is a bad thing, in that it binds people to the system. Chris Bambery argues, for example: “One crucial effect of such precarious workers is to drive down wages and conditions for all and to make it more difficult to take any form of collective action.”

Everyone a contractor

Indeed, it’s true that self-employment has increasingly been “thrust upon” workers as part of an ongoing attack on wages and conditions. Jake Williams, a

commenter on the revleft.com forum puts it like this:

“A whole lot of people who are regarded as something like ‘self-employed’ are self-employed in a sort of legalistic way that actually means they’re more exploited and fucked over by their real employers.”

A classic local example would have been the former maintenance workers of Telecom NZ (now Spark), who were forcibly converted into “independent contractors” in 2009. The identity of the boss and their rates of pay remained the same; however, now they had to buy and maintain their own vehicles and tools, and lost their rights to paid vacations, sick leave and other benefits of salary/wage workers.

The current major form which global capitalism takes, neoliberalism, is based on bringing “the principles of the market” – buying and selling for money – into every part of society. In a neoliberal economy, workers are expected to sell *themselves*, to see themselves as products or as “human capital” and market themselves accordingly. This breaks down all traditional social ties, and teaches workers to compete rather than cooperate with each other.

The ideal would be for everyone to become a tiny capitalist “contractor” rather than a waged worker, without those few rights that organized workers have won over the centuries. The right-wing property millionaire Bob Jones once said that in his ideal society, everyone would be an entrepreneur – down to trash collectors owning their own trucks and competing among each other for business. It is doubtful that such a world would have much room for solidarity, respect for others or for the environment.

Freedom is a two-edged sword

Karl Marx himself, in his 1864 work on “productive and unproductive” labour, had this to say:

“The self-employed labourer, for example, is his own wage labourer, and his own means of production confront him in his own mind as capital. As his own capitalist, he employs himself as a wage labourer.” (Old-fashioned sexist language in original.)

In other words, the self-employed worker *exploits him/herself*, to earn a living in the market. Ash Ambirge, from the “snarky business advice” website *themiddlefingerproject.org*, puts it like this:

“[B]eing your own boss is infinitely harder than having a boss... Gone are the days when you just take orders and go home at 5pm to your cozy little cottage to watch *Desperate Housewives* while shoving Twizzlers down your throat.

“Being your own boss means a humongous fucking time investment.

“Being your own boss means mega responsibility.

“Being your own boss means that the work is never done.

“Being your own boss means rules, regulations, taxes, paperwork.”

Given that, why would anyone do it? Ambirge continues:

“Because being your own boss also means freedom, of course.”

As John Whiteside Parsons, the American rocket scientist and occultist, put it: “freedom is a two-edged sword”. The self-employed worker is free in the

sense that a stray cat is free. The freedom from having to sell one's labour-power to a boss is replaced with the *necessity* of selling one's labour-power, or the products of it, to a host of different clients – the alternative, of course, being to starve.

Control over labour

But, as Ambirge puts it, this freedom is also “*creative freedom... to be you in ways you've never been before.*” A self-employed worker has autonomy over the *process* of work; they can decide when and how to do the job. To a telecommunications contractor, this possibly doesn't mean much; for an immaterial or “creative” worker – for example, in software, publishing or design – it is quite important.

Even as neoliberal capitalism dumps workers into self-employment whether they like it or not, some workers find that the upside of autonomy over the work process makes up for the downside of insecurity and the vagaries of market forces. This makes the increasing numbers of self-employed under neoliberalism a more complex political issue than to simply declare it a social evil. Cheerfully informing a freelancer that under socialism they'll have a steady full-time job in a state enterprise may not be as enticing as some conservative leftists might think.

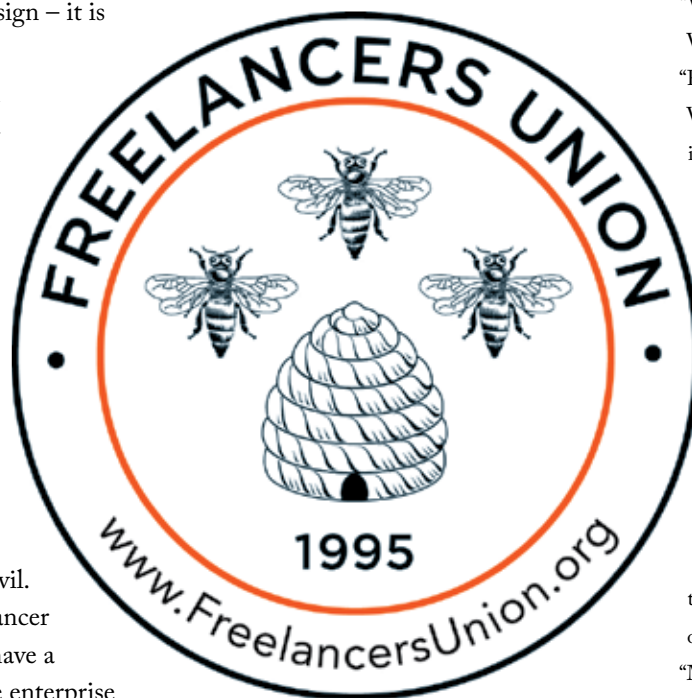
In a post-industrial advanced capitalist economy, where industrialisation is increasingly “outsourced” to low-wage and low-freedom countries, increasingly creative and intelligent young people will find the self-employed life to be actually preferable to having a steady job. But more crucially for socialists, they may also find new ways to organise.

Freelancers' Union

Sara Horowitz, a former union lawyer and organizer in New York City, founded the Freelancers' Union in 2001. The main selling point of the FU was not to engage in collective bargaining with clients – partly because, under United States labour law, it is not actually recognized as a union. Rather, the FU specialises in providing collective access to subsidized health insurance – an absolutely vital social goal for workers in the pre-Obamacare United States. It also provides a Portable Benefits Network, where self-employed workers can keep their social benefits while moving between temporary assignments – another gain which is not usually available to low-paid US workers.

On the

FU's website,



Horowitz and other writers enthusiastically extol the freelance lifestyle as “the way of the future”, with traditional workers' unions described as “a moment in history”. In an article entitled “Welcome to the Quiet Revolution”, Horowitz links freelancing to other lifestyle changes which promote the ability to live better under neoliberalism:

“It's a revolution away from consumption and toward connection. Away from individual acquisition

and toward collective action. It's a million small choices that, together, add up to big change. ...

“We're saving more — and putting our money in credit union instead of banks.

“We're eating healthy and local — and shopping at local farmers markets instead of corporate chains. We're buying our clothes at thrift stores and abandoning mass-produced mall stores.

“We're thinking about what each purchase means—for us and for our community.

“The numbers back it up. Since the recession ended, spending by the richest 5% has risen 17 percent. The rest of us? Just 1 percent.

“We've stopped looking for more.

We just want enough. And better.

“Freelancers know this best of all.

When you get by on fluctuating income, you know you've got to plan for your low-times, not your high-times.”

In another article, “Freelancers Redefining Success”, she continues:

“As the availability of the traditional 40-hour-a-week job wanes, so does its appeal. Who wants to “clock-out” at the end of the day when you can dictate your own schedule?

“Many freelancers rightly see the standard workweek as a prison of the past. Managing your own time isn't just rewarding—it's practical and efficient. Parents don't have to “leave early” to pick up their kids. The idea of “killing time” until the clock strikes 5:00 becomes obsolete when that time is chiefly your own. “Time is a new currency, and successful freelancers manage, save, and spend it wisely.”

In this regard, the Freelancers' Union has a lot in common with Green politics – a narrative of both individual

and collective lifestyle changes, which – while not challenging the big guns of corporate neoliberal society – “opt out of it”, to some extent. This is not a political project that the Marxist left thinks is adequate to bring about a new future. But it is a movement of *workers* seeking to better their lives collectively, by making horizontal connections among themselves. This is thus a kind of “reformism from below” – to re-purpose a slogan from the 1960s – that we should be paying attention to.

New ways of being workers

How should the Left react to this? Certainly, a freelancer who enjoys setting her own hours and choosing her own clients and working habits, and has learned to live with administrative

overhead and financial precarity, will not be attracted to a socialist project which considers her lifestyle a pernicious artefact of neoliberalism. Chris Bambery again: “One of the problems facing the left is that they tend to focus on those who make up their core membership – older, fulltime workers who are active in trade unions and are overwhelmingly employed in the public sector.”

So the Left has to consider a way of relating to self-employed workers as *workers*, of finding a place for the self-organization of independents and freelancers within a project of workers’ power. In New Zealand, where we still have some kind of socialised health system, the main selling point of the American FU – health insurance – doesn’t have the same appeal.

But an argument could be made that, as

joining or forming a union is the basic form for wage- and salary-workers to express their power, so joining or forming *co-operatives* or *networks* should be the way forward for the self-employed. Perhaps the structures of co-operation of the “open-source” software industry offer us a way forward.

But also, as Chris Bambery suggests, self-employed and other precarious workers can be appealed to on a political, rather than a purely economic, basis. “[They] are very likely to have taken part in other forms of social protest or to have accessed anti-capitalist views via social media, the internet or books. They are watching Gaza and are fuming, watching Ferguson and feeling sympathy.”

Fight for Equal Pay continues

By Bronwen Beechey (Tamaki Makaurau/Auckland).

The Equal Pay Act of 1972 established the principle that women workers in the private sector were entitled to the same rate as men doing the same job (public service employees had won equal pay in 1960). Forty-two years later, in October 2014, aged care worker and union member Christine Bartlett won another historic legal victory for equal pay when the Court of Appeal ruled against her employer, Terranova Homes and Care Ltd. Terranova had appealed against an Employment Court ruling that the wages paid to its caregivers were lower than they would be if aged care was not work mainly done by women, and that such low pay breaches the Equal Pay Act.

The Appeals Court ruled that the law on equal pay was not limited to requiring equal pay for the same or similar work, and that it may be relevant to consider

evidence of wages paid by other employers or in other sectors. Just before Christmas last year, the Supreme Court refused to hear another appeal by Terranova against the finding. Lawyers for the Service and Food Workers Union (SFWU) are preparing to take the case back to the employment court later this year.

Bartlett said after the Appeals Court victory: “I took this case, with the support of my union, not just for myself but for the tens of thousands of caregivers who get paid close to the minimum wage for doing one of the most important jobs in our society.”

Bartlett has been touring the country speaking to nursing home employees and at public meetings about the case. She told the Southland Times on April 10: “We [care workers] feel so deeply about our job but we can’t live on love and our employers disrespect our compassion.” She said that the low wages in the industry meant that “people are

suffering; they can’t pay their bills or pay for buses to work. They come to work hungry and they can’t afford to go to the doctors.”

Shortly before Bartlett’s case won, the Statistics New Zealand’s income survey for the June quarter showed women on average earned \$24.70 an hour, while men were earning \$28.70. The lobby group Pay and Employment Equity Coalition said the difference of \$4 an hour was equal to about 14 percent of the average wage. Spokesperson Angela McLeod told Radio NZ: “What that means in percentage terms is that women are being paid 86 percent of what men earn, and so it’s gone up.

“If you were to look at it the other way, the gap has gone from 12.7 to 13.9 percent in a year.”

The continuing gap in pay between men and women is justified by employers as an unfortunate but logical outcome of the gender-segregated nature of



Kristine Bartlett with supporters at the Auckland Employment Court.

the workforce, and the fact that more women than men work part-time or casual hours through choice or due to lack of affordable childcare. According to Employers and Manufacturer's Association chief executive Kim Campbell, "The harsh reality is you have, probably

a preponderance of women working in things like elderly care, health care and so on, maybe where the pay is relatively low, that's what drives these numbers." The fact that the wages in these sectors is "relatively low" is no accident. Because

caring for the young, the sick and the elderly has traditionally been regarded as "women's work", its importance is devalued and employers are able to pay lower wages. In fact, these roles should be seen as vitally important and be paid accordingly.

The establishment of the Equal Pay Act and other legislation supporting the rights of women came about through a long struggle. The National Council of Women (NCW) passed its first resolution supporting equal pay in 1896, the year it was set up. In 1957, the NCW joined with the Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs (BPW), Federation of University Women (FUW), Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and the Public Service Association to form the Council for Equal Pay and Opportunity (CEPO) in 1957. CEPO's aims were "to bring about as soon as possible the full implementation of the principles of equal pay for equal work (or the rate for the job) and equal opportunity". Following the winning of equal pay for public service employees with the passing of the Government Service Equal Pay Act in 1960, they took up the fight for equal pay for private sector workers. They were joined by a number of unions (despite the lack of interest in equal pay shown by the Federation of Labour, the body representing private sector

unions) and later by the new generation of feminists organising in the Women's Liberation movement. Groups like the Wellington and Auckland Women's Liberation Fronts, Women For Equality and the Women's Movement for Freedom actively campaigned, handing out leaflets at factory gates showing the wage gap, demanding that unions pay their female employees equal wages, and holding protest vigils against delays in delivering equal pay.

Following the passing of the Equal Pay Act 1972, feminists campaigned for pay equity - equal pay for women doing work with similar levels of responsibility or skill as higher-paid, male-dominated jobs - as a means of overcoming the historic undervaluing of typically female work. There was also a push to open up traditionally male-dominated industries such as construction, engineering and meat processing to women workers and apprentices. The Coalition for Equal Value, Equal Pay was set up by women's groups and unions in 1986. The Employment Equity Act was passed in 1990, but repealed within months after

the National Party came to government.

In 2009, the current National government abolished the Pay and Employment Equity plan of Action and the Pay and Employment Equity Unit that had been set up in the Department of Labour in 2004. In response, the Pay Equity Challenge Coalition was set up by unions, women's organisations, academic and community groups. The coalition has challenged the National government to state what its plans are for closing the gender pay gap. It is this inaction by the government that forced Kristine Bartlett and the unions to take the equal pay case to court, where the government intervened on behalf of the employers arguing against the right of women to equal pay.

The struggle for equal pay and pay equity for women continues. While Kristine Bartlett's victory is a big step forward, the pressure needs to be kept up to ensure that her struggle on behalf of low-paid women workers is successful.

Fightback Subscription Appeal 2015

In 2015, Fightback will publish 6 issues of our magazine, plus regular updates on our website, with news, analysis and theory on struggle, solidarity and socialism, in Aotearoa/New Zealand and overseas.

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2. Taking out an ordinary subscription to the magazine of \$10 per year;
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In the Shadow of Kim Dotcom- the NZ left taking lessons from the 2014 Election

This piece was submitted to Fightback by Ben Peterson (MANA Otautahi) and represents his personal opinion. Fightback publishes it for discussion rather than endorsement.

For those on the left, last year's election result was bitterly disappointing. Not only was John Key and the National Party returned to power with an increased majority, but the MANA Party lost its sole MP Hone Harawira. In the wake of this let-down it is important that those on the left takes serious and sober lessons from the InternetMANA experiment. But while we need to reflect, it is important to not let our disappointment cloud our judgement.

The false consensus

Since the election there is an analysis of the InternetMANA experiment that is shared (with some variation) by most political actors. From those on the right to members and organisation of the radical left, the narrative is essentially the same. This popular consensus goes as follows: Hone Harawira and the MANA movement had built a relatively successful organisation and kaupapa around fighting for the rights of Maori, the poor and dispossessed. Enter Kim Dotcom. Seeing the opportunity for Dotcom's millions, Hone rammed through an opportunistic political alliance, which watered down and distorted MANA's kaupapa. Now discredited, InternetMANA was unable to generate any momentum, and its support dwindled to the point where Hone lost his seat in Te Tai Tokerau. The lesson being that it was a mistake for MANA to make such an opportunistic deal, and they were punished for it.

This consensus is wrong. It is entirely factually inaccurate.

ally inaccurate.

While it is predominantly driven by mainstream commentators and the media, it also dominates discussions on the election by those on the left. This false narrative distorts discussion for leftists, and thus limits the lessons the left can take from this experience. We need to peel back the myths, and start from reality.

Myth- Kim Dotcom cost MANA support

The central point of the false consensus is that 'deal with Dotcom' cost MANA supporters. This is demonstrably false.

Most obviously, the vote for InternetMANA increased by roughly 50% from 2011 to 2014, from 24,168 in 2011 to 34,094 votes in 2014 - an increase of just slightly under 10,000 votes. This total would have been enough to bring in a second MP, had Hone held Te Tai Tokerau. Given that, and that the entire motivation for the InternetMANA campaign was to strengthen their voice in parliament, it would seem that the party vote campaign was actually successful.

The second, and more nuanced, version the same argument is that while the vote *increased* in the general population, it wasn't enough to counteract a loss of support amongst MANA's base in Maori seats. Again, this is disproven when looking at the election results.

In 2011 the MANA vote in the Maori electorates in total was 25,889. In 2014, this had significantly increased to a total of 29,207. The MANA vote increased in 4 of the 7 Maori seats, and only slightly dropped where it didn't improve.

Interestingly, and importantly, even

though Hone Harawira failed to carry Te Tai Tokerau, it was not because the Internet deal cut into his base. Hone's vote in the north actually increased from 8,121 in 2011 to 8,969 in 2014. Ultimately what defeated MANA in Te Tai Tokerau was the forces *against* MANA, not being abandoned by supporters.

Some will argue that we will never know what would have happened had MANA never made the deal with Dotcom, and that MANA's vote may have been even higher. While on a certain level this is true (we will never know what could have happened), there is no indication that this is the case. In particular, looking at opinion polling before the Internet alliance showed MANA receiving less than 1% of the vote. After the alliance was announced, and during the early part of the election campaign, the percentage increased, briefly reaching 3.5% before dropping to between 1-2% of the vote. While opinion polls are not 100% accurate, it strongly suggests that MANA's vote increased with the collaboration between it and the Internet party.

At the end of the day, *the assertion that the deal with the Internet Party cost MANA support is not supported by any available statistical evidence.* While there are plenty of anecdotes of people not voting MANA to avoid Dotcom, all statistical evidence strongly suggests the opposite.

Myth two- The sell out

Even though there is no evidence that the Internet Party alliance cost MANA support (and evidence suggests the opposite), some may still argue that the deal was a breach of the political kaupapa of the MANA movement.

Some argue that making an alliance with a party established by a billionaire was incompatible with the spirit of MANA as a fighting movement, so even if its support was not immediately affected, the organisation has changed and ceased to be a vehicle for change.

For this to be the case at least one of the following needs to be shown:

- A clear rightward change in MANA policies and platform.
- A clear change in strategic direction of the MANA movement (away from a movement of activists).
- The alliance being formed on a totally unprincipled basis (sharing no common kaupapa, membership and support being fundamentally opposed)

A step to the right?

There is no compelling evidence of MANA turning to the right or becoming conservative during the election campaign. Arguably, MANA was more clearly left in 2014 than in 2011. In 2011 MANA was ambiguous on equal marriage rights, and Hone's personal position was opposed. Through internal campaigning, MANA was won to a positive position.

MANA has key members who have some religious affinities with the state of Israel; however during the election campaign central leaders came out strongly in support of Palestine - hardly the actions of a group trying to placate a new coalition partner.

Policy announcements during the campaign showed no sign of a clear move to the right. Some critics voiced concern over the full employment policy, which pledged to use a portion of ACC (state accident compensation insurance) reserves to fund a massive full employment scheme aimed at providing money to small community-based groups and enterprises. The critique centres on two points: one, that the ACC reserves should be invested back into providing

better sickness benefits and coverage, and two, that this is a right wing policy in that it pledges to give money to small businesses. These arguments are not compelling.

In the first instance, critics have identified a contradiction in some policy, rather than a rightward slide. While there was a conflict between the stated ACC policy of MANA, and the new employment policy that used ACC reserves to spur employment, this wasn't accompanied by walking away from any of MANA's other policy platforms (drastically expanding health care, increasing tax on the rich and corporations etc).

The second instance unnecessarily injects negative meaning into the ambiguities in the policy. The policy does talk of 'entrepreneurs', social enterprise and self start-ups. It does not however define what these are. Whatever these are, and however imperfect the language used, it is clear from this policy that it would result in a massive pouring of wealth into poor communities where unemployment is rife. While it is imperfect, and the left can and should critique and push for this policy to go further, it is clear that the practical implication of such a policy would be a massive transfer of wealth into working class communities.

At the very least, such ambiguities are not a departure from the existing MANA policy platform, which included market mechanisms in other policies.

A strategic shift?

So while there was no rightward change in the policy platform, this does not automatically exclude a change in strategic direction. Since its inception, MANA had consciously built itself around being a party of activists, with a radical vision for society. I do not believe that there is any evidence of a break with MANA's existing strategic approach. Rather the reaching out to the Internet Party was consistent with the existing kaupapa

and practice of the movement.

If the primary reasoning behind the outreach to the Internet Party was purely to access Kim Dotcom's millions, then this would be a serious departure from MANA's practice. While there were certainly MANA members who were keen to get their hands on these 'rivers of gold', this was not the motivation put forward by the central leadership of the movement.

Both before and after the internet deal, Hone Harawira outlined how he came to think about the Internet Party. When talking to some youth up north, one of the younger MANA members asked him if it was ok to step down from MANA and join the Internet Party. After some initial discomfort, and some investigation, Harawira came to the conclusion that it was worth investigating if collaboration is possible with the Internet Party. It was not the attraction of money, but the prospects of reaching out and involving young people who were attracted to alternative politics that was of interest to the MANA leadership.

This is consistent with the strategic vision of the MANA movement since its founding. It has always undertook to explore ways build out from its base in the Maori world and link up with people fighting for systemic change, such as Sue Bradford, Mike Treen, John Minto and the socialist left. The attractiveness of the Internet Party was reinforced by the political evolution of Kim Dotcom in response to the police raids on his mansion. While hardly a socialist, Dotcom's vocal criticism of the surveillance state had and has a certain resonance with potentially radicalising young people.

Finally, the MANA movement did not just accept the Internet Party as it presented itself, but actively contributed to its formation, playing a decisive role in getting Laila Harre appointed as leader of the party, and other prominent leftists on its list.

Linking up with the Internet Party was

not a departure from established practice, but a continuation of it. Exactly the same impulses that lead to MANA working with the socialist left, led it to seek to work with the Internet Party. MANA has always sought out allies to develop its kaupapa and fight for a fairer society. This was just another attempt to do so.

So then what went wrong?

So far this piece has outlined how the vote for MANA actually increased, and that there was no break from existing policy or strategic direction. If this is the case, then why and how does MANA find itself without a voice in parliament?

MANA lost the election less because of the decisions of its leadership than due to the decisions of its opponents- namely the Labour Party. Despite MANA being committed to a change of government, the Labour Party pulled out all stops into smashing MANA. Instead of putting resources into defeating sitting national members, or articulating an alternative message for the voting public, the Labour Party did all it could to smash an alternative to its left.

In Te Tai Tokerau this meant that all parties (except the Greens), explicitly endorsed the Labour candidate Kelvin Davis (NZ First, Maori Party, National, Labour and others). Despite MANA increasing its vote, this wasn't enough to counteract the resources, media attention and backing of the entire political establishment.

There is an argument that Kim Dotcom played some role in catalysing and energising this opposition to Hone. However, there is no evidence to suggest that this was decisive. For example, if there was a big turnout just to beat MANA in Te Tai Tokerau, you could reasonably expect that there would be more candidate votes than party votes, as people would have been instructed to just vote for Kelvin Davis, and do what they will with the party vote. The

opposite is the case. About 800 voted for a party, but not for a candidate. This was actually more than similar Maori electorates. This suggests that the 'Kill Dotcom' factor was not decisive.

Ultimately, rather than shooting ourselves in the foot with a poorly thought through alliance with Kim Dotcom, all indications point to MANA being politically defeated on the day. Rather than crashing on the rocks of Kim Dotcom and seeing its own support evaporate, it was the combined powers of the entire political establishment that held off the challenge that Internet MANA presented.

Why does this matter?

I think this is important for leftists to be clear on. This is not just an exercise in setting the record straight. As important as it is to have a clear view of the past, it is much important to be looking to the future. Nor is this an attempt to say that nothing has changed post-election for the MANA movement. Losing its seat in parliament will have an obvious impact on the state of the movement, and time will tell if MANA finds new ways forward (I for one am hoping for the best).

As it stands the prevailing myth on the left is that MANA failed because it made a dodgy deal with Dotcom, and paid the price. It would be a colossal error to let those myths stand because they would have real impacts on the future.

The implication of blaming MANA's loss on the deal would be that it was a mistake to attempt to reach out to new organisations and formations. Therefore, in the future, leftists should stick by their established organisations, and not try to work towards change with other organisations, lest the kaupapa be wounded and support be lost.

Building towards radical change will take finding and building on these alliances. In Venezuelan revolutionary

change was led by a former military officer, Hugo Chavez. If the left had failed to link up with his group in the military then his political evolution would probably not have been as effective, and the revolutionary changes in Venezuela may never have happened.

Failure to be able to make these links can leave the established left isolated. In both Spain and Greece established left parties (the United Left and the KKE) have been left sidelined and weaker as their support melts into new radical projects (Podemos and Syriza). The separation of old and new leaves both weaker, as the resources and experience of former struggles are isolated from the new movement for revolutionary change.

The challenge for leftists today is not to retreat into ideas or lament the election, but to build greater and stronger organisation, movements and political clarity. The election process showed that our potential audience is expanding (the vote increased), but that our political instruments (organisation and ideas) has to be stronger to defeat challenges when they arise.

The rulers of today want the left to remain small and isolated. They want a left that's pure and impotent, and that can't link up with people as they begin to struggle. Smashing the post-election consensus is an important part of building a left that is ready for fights in the future.

Can capitalists be revolutionaries? Internet MANA, elections and alliances



MANA activists in Otago

By Ian Anderson (Fightback/MANA Poneke).

Ben Peterson (MANA Otago) recently submitted an article contending that MANA gained more than it lost from the Internet MANA campaign (In the Shadow of Kim Dotcom, p11). As a fellow MANA socialist, I have some agreements and disagreements with this assessment that I'd like to flesh out. Ben's article focuses heavily on voting numbers, and offers a methodological reason for this:

"While there are plenty of anecdotes of people not voting MANA to avoid Dotcom, all statistical evidence strongly suggests the opposite."

There are many ways to kill a cat. According to polls, support for the campaign dropped off in the last week of the election – after Kim Dotcom's 'Moment of Truth' event. We might argue that relative to Dotcom's donations, each Internet MANA vote cost over \$100. However, this is clearly crude; the central contention is over the nature of

the project, its qualities not simply its quantities.

Apparently the project was threatening enough that the establishment parties, including Labour, ganged up to kick MANA out. This is not the first time Labour campaigned hard to unseat Hone, but the Maori Party's choice to back Kelvin Davis was new and decisive. Despite Ben's claims, it's entirely conceivable that Dotcom's association with Hone made Labour's job of rallying support easier. A comment on Fightback's website suggests:

If people REALLY want to find out why Hone didn't get his seat in Tai [Tokerau], why aren't they surveying, and asking the people who live in Tai [Tokerau] themselves?

Considering MANA's explicit attempt to forge a nationwide left electoral project, on the basis that "what's good for Maori is good for everyone," I don't think the question is limited to Te Tai Tokerau voters. However, this anonymous commentator is definitely heading in the right direction; if it gained or lost support, why? What were the qualities

that attracted or repelled people? What social forces were brought into play, for what political programme?

A socialist approach to electoral work requires not just a numbers game, but an exploration of programme and alliances beyond the parliamentary sphere.

Where we agree

Elections are a site of struggle. A "syndicalism of protest," in socialist historian Dave Renton's words – claiming street movements alone can bring revolutionary change – offers no future. Renton cites the example of Egypt, where leftists built the street movement but shied away from the political sphere, leaving space for counter-revolution. Power abhors a vacuum; if workers and progressives cannot win power, conservative forces will step in. Only a combined struggle in the political, cultural and economic spheres offers any chance of success.

In Aotearoa/NZ today, the political balance of forces strongly favours the capitalist class. Even within Labour and the Greens, firmly pro-capitalist forces dominate. Many are dissatisfied,

as record-low voter turnout attests – alongside thousands rallying against the TPPA, which is backed by both major parties. Rather than blaming workers for ‘apathy’, the challenge is to forge a political alternative.

An indigenous-rooted movement, breaking from the Brown Table and forging an alliance with tau iwi forces on the basis of a social-democratic programme – this is not a formation socialists should merely dismiss.

Alliances between indigenous and tau iwi forces

In the second chapter of Maori Sovereignty, Donna Awatere outlines the need for “a restructuring of the white alliance”:

“Maori sovereignty has always been a thread of belief, commitment and desire, seen in the bloody defence of our land, in the Ringatu movement, Kotahitanga, Kingitanga. Set against our people has been the united strength of white people. The Maori now seeks to break that unity in the interests of justice for the Maori people. This concept challenges white people to examine their role in a system which to this day still treats us like dogs.

Gramsci’s concept of hegemonic consciousness has relevance to Maori sovereignty. In hegemonic consciousness, a class puts its interests with other classes at a national level and establishes alliances with them.

These alliances are necessary because changes cannot occur with the Maori on our own. White people have cut across class barriers to unite on the basis of white hegemony; that is, white domination of the Maori. To overcome this requires a restructuring of the white alliance.”

Why you should get involved in Fightback

10 Point Programme

1. Constitutional transformation based on Tino Rangatiratanga, Mana Motuhake and workers power. Tangata whenua and community co-ops to operate as kaitiaki over public resources.
2. Secure jobs for all who are ready to work, with a living wage and a shorter working week.
3. The benefit system to be replaced with a universal basic income.
4. Full rights for migrant workers.
5. Opposition to all imperialist intervention and alliances, including New Zealand state’s participation in military occupations and the Five Eyes agreement.
6. No revolution without women’s liberation. Full funding for sexual violence prevention and survivor support, free access to all reproductive technologies. For socialist-feminist solutions to the marginalisation of all gender minorities, within the movement and in society.
7. For an ecosocialist solution to climate change. End fossil fuel extraction, expand green technology and public transport.
8. For freedom of technology and information. Expansion of affordable broadband internet to the whole country. An end to Government spying on our own citizens and on others. End corporate copyright policies in favour of creative commons centred on producers and users.
9. Abolish prisons, replace with restorative justice and rehabilitation.
10. Free health-care and education at every level, run by those directly affected. In healthcare; remove inequities in accident compensation, move towards health system based on informed consent, opposition to “top-down” efforts to change working people’s behaviour. In education; full public funding for all forms of education and research, enshrining education in te tiriti and te reo.

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Kim Dotcom was never out of the limelight

Awatere examines apparently progressive tau iwi forces (Pacific Islanders, white women, trade unions and the far left) and finds all wanting, too wrapped up in their own self-interest to meaningfully support Maori sovereignty.

Left nationalist Bruce Jesson contended that tau iwi far leftists missed Awatere's point; that she offered an alliance to Pakeha willing to support Maori sovereignty. In any case, Awatere's premise that the 'white alliance' must be restructured merits further exploration.

In 2011, MANA (as a force for rangatiratanga) tried aligning with Pakeha socialists, standing Sue Bradford and John Minto in general seats. This failed to deliver votes; the left remains marginal among tau iwi. Although socialists remained free to voice our politics as a part of MANA, the leadership sought a new alliance in 2014. This is where Kim Dotcom and the Internet Party came in.

In rejecting the InternetMANA alliance, ISO's Shoomi Yoon offers a caricature of Kim Dotcom:

"For all his "benevolence" Kim Dotcom's politics are not to be trusted. His first political act was to donate to the far right racist John Banks. He collects WWII paraphernalia and owns an Adolf Hitler signed copy of *Mein Kampf*. He makes jokes about violence towards sex

workers. He is, in other words, a thoroughly unsavoury character. ...and, worst of all from a political point of view: he's a boss. We want no truck with the bosses or their parties."

In some ways this paragraph is a little absurd; if anyone honestly believes that Dotcom's copy of *Mein Kampf* tells you anything meaningful about his politics, his Nazism is surely far more of a concern than his profit from piracy. While Yoon's article identifies that Dotcom is unsavoury and a capitalist, difficult points to dispute, the article doesn't make a serious effort to locate Dotcom politically.

Dotcom's donation to John Banks occurred before his house was raided; as phrased by Jacobin Magazine's Gavin Mueller:

"It's so easy to hate Kim Dotcom that you almost forget that the US convinced the New Zealand government to send in an assault brigade, bereft of a valid warrant but outfitted with automatic weapons and helicopters, to arrest a Finnish citizen at the demand of Hollywood studios."

Or as phrased by Annette Sykes on the InternetMANA Road Trip, in terms invoking the Urewera Raids under the

last Labour government:

"Families are destroyed when the cops come into your house with their guns. That's what happened to Kim Dotcom. I must say that was the only thing about him, I don't care about his money; that was the only thing that I really admired him for. Because when it happened he stood up for him and his kids and his family."

Dotcom's *political* affinity with the MANA Movement was forged around opposition to state repression, around democratic demands. The Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement, expansion of state surveillance powers, violent enforcement of copyright laws, are dividing lines separating Dotcom from most of the capitalist class. Considering Dotcom's employment practices, racism and other glaring flaws it is debatable whether Dotcom and MANA initially had much more affinity than that.

Alliance can transform the nature of the allies – which can either strengthen or destroy political projects. As revolutionary socialist Rosa Luxemburg argued in her analysis of the Dreyfus Affair, in which socialists rallied to support a persecuted Jewish officer in the French imperial army:

“We can’t act as indifferent witnesses to what goes on in the interior of the bourgeoisie, unless socialism could be realized outside of bourgeois society, for example through the foundation in each country of a separate colony. But since we haven’t thought of emigrating, as it were, from bourgeois to socialist society, but on the contrary of overthrowing bourgeois society by means created within that same society, the proletariat must make an effort, in its forward march to victory, to influence all social events in a favourable direction.”

At the 2014 MANA AGM, Sykes argued that a deal with any forces required clarity on policies and principles, what Leninists might call programmatic clarity. The “InternetMANA policy weave,” negotiated as part of the deal, was broadly social democratic. The leading involvement of progressive women such as Laila Harre and Miriam Pierard was also promising, with Pierard and gender spokesperson Pani Farvid distancing the party from Dotcom’s sexism.

At the same time, there is a risk with such an economically powerful figure that alignment could lead to a sacrifice of independence. The campaign routinely stressed support for ‘entrepreneurs’ as an anti-poverty strategy, with Dotcom explaining how German state support enabled his rise. Ben suggests notions like ‘entrepreneur’ are open to interpretation, and aspects of the campaign were certainly vague. However, Dotcom sent a clear message: more state support means more opportunities to climb the capitalist ladder. Dotcom’s class position is clearly more exploitative than the position of a self-employed worker.

This entrepreneurial emphasis cannot patronisingly be reduced to “imperfect” politics that don’t go far enough, as in Ben’s article. Veteran politicians like Laila Harre are capable of committing to strategic courses we may disagree with. In 2009–2010, Harre oversaw the loss

of thousands of jobs as HR manager for the Auckland Super City transition. In a *Daily Blog* entry during the InternetMANA campaign, Harre criticised the “polarisation” of politics, the danger of getting stuck in “positional ruts” rather than seeing “shared issues”, as if workers and progressives can simply find common ground with the owners and administrators who routinely destroy lives. Again, these are not the naive errors of a novice; Harre believes a negotiated class peace will deliver social justice.

Dotcom’s distinct qualities as a capitalist were double-edged; while he was more anti-regime than the investors who routinely donate to major parties, most donors have the good grace to fade into the background. MANA’s leadership had little ability to keep Dotcom in check, culminating in the Moment of Truth event (which MANA did not officially endorse).

Annette Sykes summarised her problem with the campaign at the national MANA member’s hui in November 2014: “If there are shared values, there should be shared control.” Dotcom’s machinery took over, with the MANA leadership having little to no say over the millions of dollars earmarked for the campaign.

Socialists had warned of the potential for a sacrifice of independence. This is where I agree with Shomi Yoon’s article on the Internet MANA alliance:

“If we had a revolutionary organisation with real roots in the workplaces, in trade unions, and on the campuses, we could put the pressure and priorities on a new left party.”

Ben cites Syriza (The Coalition of the Radical Left, which recently formed a government in Greece) as an example of what’s possible. Revolutionaries operate openly in Syriza, and the Left Platform challenges the leadership where necessary. In late February, Syriza’s leadership was forced to accept conces-

sions to the Eurozone, and spun these concessions as a victory. Syriza’s Left Platform rejected the deal, with 45% of the parliamentary wing voting against it. This kind of internal pressure, combined with an extra-parliamentary movement, is necessary to avoid capture by ‘pragmatic’ institutional logics. Promisingly, the Greek parliament recently passed anti-poverty legislation despite EU opposition.

Although revolutionary socialists operated openly in MANA, we were too programmatically unclear and organisationally weak to translate our occasional successes into lasting organisation. From 2011–2014, the three major socialist organisations (International Socialist Organisation, Socialist Aotearoa, Fightback) failed to form any coherent current in MANA. There are some real differences between these groups – differences over challenging sexist and oppressive behaviour, over the importance of a homogeneous perspective on socialist history, over relationships to trade unions. There’s also a sectarian, competitive mindset in small socialist groups that prevents effective coordination. Most crucially, we don’t have the deep roots among tau iwi workers that the sovereignty movement has among Maori workers – with even prominent figures like John Minto and Sue Bradford failing to win significant Pakeha support.

If we can’t build something serious, Dotcom is a more attractive prospect. For any misgivings leftists may have about the Dotcom alliance, the challenge comes back to the shallow roots of socialist and progressive forces among Pakeha.



Entrenched neoliberalism and workplace organisation

Ian Anderson (Fightback Whanganui-a-Tara/Wellington) provides a broad overview of neoliberalism, a period of capitalism marked by insecurity and poverty wages.

Towards the end of *Only Their Purpose is Mad*, an account of the neoliberal offensive in Aotearoa/NZ, Bruce Jesson describes the effect on communities:

“[Some] freezing works existed for 70 or 80 years. Towns grew up around them, and with them a community and a way of life. Three generations of freezing-workers would do similar jobs, be active in the same union, play in the same rugby league or netball team, go to the same schools, drink in the same pubs and clubs and share the same memories. A community depends on continuity. Suddenly the sharemarket collapses, the company folds, the freezing-works closes and the town turns into a place of shiftless unemployed and

go-getting contractors.”

In the last 30 years, communities have been shattered, social contracts broken, workers divided. For those of us under 30, unions are novel (even unknown) concepts, now covering around 10% of the private sector.

Some call this a ‘post-industrial’ period, yet industrial production has expanded globally; capitalists just have more ability to globally shop around for the fastest and cheapest deal. Some call it the decline of the nation state, yet repressive militarist measures keep expanding, finding new technological forms; in Bourdieu’s terms, the “left hand” of the state has retreated while the “right hand” of the state advanced.

The basis of stability has shifted. In the ‘Social Democratic’ heyday from the 1950s to the 1970s, capitalism in the imperialist core was stabilised through a corporatist deal between labour, capital, and the state. Since the neoliberal assaults on organised labour, living standards have come to depend on credit: the

housing market, credit cards, growing private debt.

For David Harvey, neoliberalism is a system of renewed “accumulation by dispossession,” through the expansion of financial markets. In Aotearoa/NZ the National Party’s supposedly ‘mixed’ policies, including the further privatisation of power companies, sale of state housing, and undermining of workplace rights fit this pattern.

UNITE National Director Mike Treen recently asserted that the current National government is “not a radical neoliberal government.” I would suggest the neoliberal offensive (or attack) of the ‘80s and ‘90s largely won and we are in a period of *entrenchment*. Many of the more brutal attacks of the offensive period – mass redundancies, destruction of unions, slashing of benefits – are no longer necessary. None of the flagship policies of Rogernomics and Ruthenasia have been substantially reversed.

Market intervention to save the finance sector is nothing new, and has occurred where necessary throughout the



neoliberal period (the ultra-right dream of stateless capitalism never existed). Yet the 2008 financial crisis rocked the confidence of the international ruling class.

Czech philosopher and socialist Michael Hauser ('Europe in a labyrinth and the power of ideas', *OpenDemocracy*) notes the gap between the rhetoric and reality of class rule in Europe, with neoliberalism collapsing in words but not in practice. A 2008 official document, on recovery in Europe, implied a move to the left:

"The current economic crisis gives another opportunity to show that Europe serves its citizens best when it makes concrete action the touchstone. Europe can make the difference. In difficult times, the temptation is to feel powerless. But Europe is not powerless. The levers of government, the instruments of the European Union, the influence of intelligent coordination add up to a potent force to arrest the trend towards a deeper recession. A Europe ready to take swift, bold, ambitious and well-targeted action will be a Europe able

to put the brakes on the downturn and begin to turn the tide. We sink or swim together. (...) The fundamental principle of this Plan is solidarity and social justice. In times of hardship, our action must be geared to help those most in need. To work to protect jobs through action on social charges."

Yet Europe would soon embark on a violent 'austerity' project that reduced government spending without addressing the root of the crisis. In the US, the story has become a cliché; Barack Obama, elected on a platform of "Hope" and "Change" in 2008, failed to deliver much in a first term with a Democratic majority.

Aotearoa/NZ was not shaken by the global economic crisis in the same way as the US and Europe. We haven't seen the extremes of austerity faced by Greece, facing 25% unemployment. However the long-term trends (declining real wages, retreating social services, declining home ownership and state housing) remain steady. A property bubble continues to grow, which both

Forbes and local bankers predict will have to burst. National may make the occasional minor compromise, but of course they show no interest in reversing these trends.

Measures like the Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) seek to further entrench this regime internationally. Because of this institutional entrenchment, we need a political and industrial movement, a national and international movement more than ever.

Some argue that Aotearoa/NZ is facing neo-colonisation. It might be more accurate to say that Aotearoa continues to be colonised by New Zealand, the European nation-state that bloodily imposed capitalism and now asks that the most oppressed simply forget history.

Left nationalist Bruce Jesson contended that New Zealand is a 'Third World nation,' due to "our massive overseas debt, our high degree of foreign ownership and our dependence on primary exports." However, according to measures of *political allegiance* and *living standards*, which are roughly correlated, New Zea-

land appears near the top of the global pyramid:

- New Zealand consistently ranks with the top 10 countries in the UN Human Development Index, which consists largely of European countries or colonised “neo-Europes” like the United States and Australia.
- New Zealand is a member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Formed in 1961 to promote “democracy and the market economy,” the OECD is essentially a Cold War bulwark.
- Of OECD countries, NZ’s standard of living is about average.
- New Zealand collaborates with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), another Cold War bulwark.

For some left critics, New Zealand’s collaboration with US imperialism is unequal, exploitative. This ignores New Zealand’s relatively high standard of living and cultural affinity with other mainly white, English-speaking countries. The fact that a country with high rates of child poverty sits near the top of the global pyramid paints a grim picture of international capitalism. It also shows the importance of international solidarity.

Seeking a way out of this rut, we may learn from international examples. Greece’s Syriza was recently elected on an anti-austerity platform, and is currently contending with militantly austere Eurozone “partners.” Stathis Kouvelakis, a leading member of Syriza’s Left Platform, contended in a recent Jacobin article that even basic reforms are a challenge for neoliberalism:

“[Neoliberalism] poses an old dilemma in new terms, namely the division between reformists and revolutionaries. Well, reformism requires believing that some progressive reforms are possible — pro-labour reforms, the promotion

of welfare, etc — within the terms of the system.

“But in neoliberal capitalism that’s not possible anymore. So even to get relatively modest reforms which at other times would have been perfectly compatible with the system’s functioning, we need to have major confrontations and conflicts on a large scale. And we’ve seen as much in Latin America: the countries like Bolivia or Venezuela or Ecuador that have left governments are not socialist, but even this partial break with neoliberalism required lethal struggles: blood was spilt for it to be possible for Evo Morales to be elected.”

This fight for basic reforms does not mean socialists should all fall in behind the Labour Party (Syriza emerged as an alternative to the old ‘centre-left’ party). In a sense, there are no reformist parties left in parliament — although the Greens and Labour certainly have reformist members and supporters. Whereas the early Labour Parties sought a reformist path to socialism, the Fourth Labour Government initiated neoliberal attack in Aotearoa/NZ, and the Fifth Labour Government maintained the bulk of these attacks. Even former Green Party co-leader Russell Norman infamously described himself as “more pro-market” than the Nats. It’s no surprise that voter turnout has reached record-low levels (especially among marginalised groups), and it would be dishonest to fall in behind the Labour Party. Socialists may seek new representation in parliament, but this can be perverted or defeated without a strong anti-capitalist movement in the community.

Although neoliberalism shut down old frontiers of struggle, like any oppressive system it also opens up new frontiers. Today the majority of union members are women, and the frontlines of union organisation are in casualised and low

wage sectors. Campaigns for a Living Wage and against Zero Hour Contracts are gathering public momentum.

Recent years have seen a *defensive* struggle against casualisation in established union sectors like meatworks and the public sector, and an *offensive* struggle against casualisation in formerly unorganised sectors like service and hospitality (Socialist Perspectives for Aotearoa/New Zealand, pX-X). Members of Fightback and other socialist groups have played a major role in Unite’s fight for job security.

The neoliberal regime polarises hours of work, with many underemployed (working less than 20 hours) and many overemployed (working more than 50). Conflicting and competing schedules do not lend themselves to collective organisation; in fact that is the aim of a competitive labour market. In light of this instability, socialists assert rights to stability and control. This means a universal basic income, jobs for all who are ready to work, with dignified work and guaranteed hours (say 20 hours a week across sectors).

Slogans calling for “stability” may seem conservative to some. Here I agree with Ben Watson, a former member of the British SWP, in a reflection on the relationship between mental health and socialism:

“If real socialism is campaigning for crèches and demanding rights for mental health users and pushing for bicycle lanes and supporting a local strike, isn’t it a little dull and shabby and boring? Well, no, because the delight is how UTTERLY HORRIFYING our demands for simple human things is in the eyes of those whose careers depend on realising profits for capital.”

Lessons from the Unite experience



Excerpt from A History of Unite Union, first delivered as a contribution to the first ever international fast food workers conference, in New York, May 2014. Also published in Unite News.

By Mike Treen, Unite National Director.

Unions need new approaches to succeed in the kinds of industries we're talking about. The traditional approach of recruiting union members one by one over a prolonged period can't work in these industries because the boss can find out where that's going on and bully people out of it. Workers often aren't in these jobs for long enough for that slow accumulation of union members to work or make a difference. You need public, political campaigns that provide protection for workers and gives workers confidence you mean business. The union

has to be the framework for workers to find their voice and lead struggles.

It has to be all-or-nothing. "Supersize My Pay" was a public, political campaign against the fast food companies which exposed them as exploiters in any way we could. We went after their "brand" which they value above all else. We brought the community in to give public support and prevent victimisation. When those approaches gained momentum, workers started to gain confidence that maybe the risk of standing up for themselves is worth it. That's the key question – how do you build that confidence?

The campaign needs ambitious goals to make the fight worthwhile. It also needs to combine an industrial campaign with a political campaign around issues like lifting the minimum wage and getting rid of youth rates.

Our modern, industrial unions emerged decades ago out of new models of industry-wide organising which broke away from the narrow craft unions of the day. There are some major differences in size between the industries where those unions were based and the key economic sectors in western countries today – such as retail, service and finance. But a large call centre in New Zealand might have 500 workers or more — which in New Zealand terms is a pretty big workplace. McDonald's employs almost 10,000 workers – it's one of the biggest private-sector employers in the country. Those workers are young workers, migrant workers, semi-casualised workers. Those are the people producing profit for the capitalist class in New Zealand today. That's the working class!

The bottom line is that organising in

these industries, where more and more of the working class, and particularly the young working class, in western countries is now employed, has to be done — by any means necessary.

What has Unite achieved?

One of the principal achievements of the Unite effort over the past decade has been maintaining an ongoing, organised presence in industries that suffer a huge turnover of staff. Annual turnover of staff in the industries we represent was, until recently, 100%. It has dropped somewhat due to the 2008-10 recession. Our membership turnover is similar. We have to recruit 5000 members a year to maintain our current size of 7000. Unite is a fast food union. 3500 of our 7000 fee-paying members are fast food workers. The important thing to note however is that we have succeeded in doing it year in and year out in industries like fast food for almost a decade.

We also have a contract with the largest casino in the country. We have contracts with the two biggest hotel chains (Accor and MCK) in the country. We have expanded our presence in security and call centres.

We invest significant resources to having an annual national delegates' conference of 150 mostly young fighters from around the country. Union officials from unions representing workers as far apart as teachers, public servants or bank workers have praised Unite for giving many of their members a positive first taste of unionism.

Major challenges remain before us. Can we extend our presence in the fast food industry — especially the franchise-dominated companies? How can we deal with the problem that hundreds of pizza delivery drivers are on self-employed contracts which we cannot legally represent? What new sectors can we look to for an organising drive? Can we resolve the contradictions between what is dubbed a “servicing model” versus an “organising model” in high turnover industries? Does Unite have a “model” at all beyond doing what seems to work?

It is true that we have had some special circumstances working in our favour. But we still have to convince thousands of young workers in a 24/7 business to join a union and pay fees by speaking to them and getting them to sign a membership form. We have done this with no financial help from the broader

union movement. We did it with volunteers, credit cards and low-paid staff, when we could even pay. It a success worth celebrating and where possible emulating.

Unite is also now not alone in doing this type of union building in New Zealand today. First Union in particular has used many of our campaigning techniques (and some of our former staff!) to launch successful recruitment drives in major non-union retail chains like The Warehouse and the Pak ‘n’ Save supermarket chain.

A rejuvenated labour movement with the unions at its heart is vital for the future of the working class. To be successful, we need to become a social movement that has a radical critique of the system we live under, a strong social justice program, and inspiring methods to challenge and change the unequal and exploitative society we are forced to live under today. Unite remains committed to playing its part in sowing the seeds for the regeneration of a labour movement that can play its natural role as leader of a society-wide movement to change the world for the better.



UNITE was an important part of the anti-youth rates movement in the mid-00's

Unite Update: International fast food day of action, Victory against Zero Hour Contracts!

Report by Joe McClure (Fightback Whanganui-a-Tara/Wellington).

At noon on April 15th 2015, Aotearoa/NZ kicked off a global fast food day of action. Workers in more than 200 cities around the world took action against the working conditions of fast food workers.

In Aotearoa/NZ, Unite Union held rallies and strikes at McDonald's stores in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. At this point McDonald's was still upholding Zero Hour Contracts, although BK and KFC had already backed down. Members of various unions and the wider community joined in chants protesting unfair contracts.

Zero hours contracts provide no guaran-

tee of work on a weekly basis, and force workers to compete against each other for the hours available. They are often inflicted on people who are already vulnerable, including women returning to the workforce after having children, immigrant workers, and young people taking a job while they study. Unite's campaign against zero hours contracts gathered momentum with positive media coverage and strikes planned across the country.

At 12.01am on May Day 2015, McDonald's finally backed down on Zero Hour Contracts! As the last major fast food chain left standing, and threatened by strikes and rallies on May Day, McDonald's was finally cowed into submission by Unite's campaign.

The National government in New Zea-

land has also stated that they will ban zero hour contracts.

Their word cannot be trusted; only unions, workers and community supporters can ensure a firm victory.

Unite shows that community-driven action can guarantee secure hours and living wages.

Crowdfunding initiative - Voices from Women and Gender Minorities

Fightback is a socialist-feminist organisation which publishes a website and themed bi-monthly magazines.

We have noticed that, despite the centrality of women, girls and gender minorities to the social movements of today, they are still a smaller minority of writers in the socialist press. We acknowledge that there are many reasons for this, some of them including the fact that these groups are weighed down by more unpaid work, that their work may not be as valued and that there's a higher chance they will come up against barriers for their involvement in political spaces.

Therefore, we wish to make the August issue of our magazine entirely written and edited by women and gender minorities to provide a platform for voices that don't often get heard. Moreover, in order to support this writing in a tangible way, all contributors to this issue will be paid at a rate of at least

\$NZ100 per page of content which could be an article (650 words per page), art work or the cover design. Contributing to socialism, activism or social change takes time and resources, and we hope that this payment will help encourage voices we don't usually hear, and give back to those who already offer their time for little credit or financial return.

However, we cannot afford to do this by our own resources. While Fightback will cover the printing costs, we are asking for those who can spare some money, and are interested in seeing more women and gender minorities producing content around socialism, anti-capitalism and decolonisation, to donate to this issue.

We need \$2600 to achieve the minimum necessary to pay all contributors. If this initiative sounds worth supporting to you, please donate!

To pledge, visit tinyurl.com/fightback-magazine



Our Fears: A poem by Karlo Mila

Koha poem by Karlo Mila for Living Wage Movement, Living Wage Whanau Day, Newtown.

This fear
That there is not enough
although we make enough food to
feed the world,
many times over.

This fear
That we are not enough
and we buy and we buy and we buy,
to keep other's eyes on us, and off us.

This fear,
That we are not safe
unless we have savings, insurance,
stocks, bonds, assets, investment prop-
erties,
all the different kinds of ways to save
for every kind of rainy day.

This fear,
That there is not enough to go around,
and we must stake our ground
live within the confines of those white
picket fences
simply do our best within these
boundaries.

This fear,
That we must each have the largest
slice of pie possible,
that to divide each working day into
\$19.25 an hour
so that people can feed their own
families
is an unreasonable idea
that would tip the whole pie cart over.

This fear,
That these ideas are so normal to us
in the society we live in,
of pies, cakes, and crumbs.

This fear,
That we are not enough
to do anything about it.

